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THE STATE OF

AI in Media 2026

Akamai

At a glance

AI deployment has raced ahead – but adoption is no longer enough. AI's value to the media business remains largely unproven, while its long-term costs are uncertain.

The next phase will be defined not by who uses the most AI, but by who applies it most intelligently: redesigning processes rather than automating yesterday's; targeting revenue as well as efficiency; and building technologies that work with both humans and agents.

Meanwhile, even as consumers embed AI in their everyday lives, their scepticism is growing. As AI creates an abundance of content, audiences may increasingly value what remains distinctly human. Judgement, distinctiveness, trust, and human connection become competitive advantages.

Key insights

1 **Micro efficiencies are not enough**
Making small efficiencies using general-purpose AI only delivers incremental gains. Meaningful return requires targeted solutions and redesigned processes.

2 **Follow the money – and the eyeballs**
AI's next big media impacts are likely to come from finding, engaging, and monetising audiences – not creating synthetic content.

3 **Software's next user is an AI agent**
The move towards agentic orchestration is dramatically changing what media companies demand from their software suppliers.

4 **Software development is AI's breakout use case**
Agentic engineering is transforming software development faster than AI is transforming traditional media workflows.

5 **Human judgement is now the scarce resource**
AI makes creation abundant and risks making it more average. Distinctiveness, trust, and human connection become more valuable.

Foreword

AI adoption is no longer the question for the media industry. The challenge now is turning widespread experimentation into meaningful business value.

Much of the attention around AI has focused on content creation. But as the DPP explores, some of its most significant opportunities may lie further downstream: in how content is discovered, distributed, personalized and monetized. Audiences do not necessarily need more content; they need better ways to find the content that matters to them.

At the same time, AI is changing how content is accessed. Search is evolving, AI crawlers are consuming content and metadata at scale, and agents are beginning to interact directly with APIs and specialist tools. This creates a new set of infrastructure challenges for media companies.

Visibility is fundamental. Organizations need to understand which AI systems are accessing their content, how often, and at what cost. But visibility must be accompanied by control: the ability to distinguish legitimate discovery from scraping, and to make decisions based on rights, territories, titles and commercial relationships.

The rise of AI agents adds another dimension. As machine-driven traffic becomes more autonomous and less predictable, questions of identity, usage control, security and auditability become increasingly important.

For Akamai, this points to a broader shift in the role of content delivery infrastructure. It is no longer simply about moving content quickly and reliably. The infrastructure layer is becoming a place where media companies can understand how their content is being accessed, apply policy, protect rights, and manage increasingly complex interactions between people, platforms and machines.

AI creates enormous opportunities for media. Capturing them will depend not only on what the technology can do, but on whether companies can maintain visibility and control as they put it to work.



John Bradshaw
Field CTO Cloud, EMEA

The wider context

AI usage

Adoption of AI is now incredibly broad. But the depth of its impact is highly variable.

Consumer use of AI continues to grow rapidly, with ChatGPT reaching 1bn monthly active users (MAUs) in May 2026 according to Sensor Tower – faster than TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram. The same report indicates that time spent in Gen AI apps doubled between H1 2025 and H1 2026.

> Time spent with Gen AI doubled in the last year

Meanwhile the reach of AI is growing quickly with the addition of AI to products we use every day. In the UK, Ofcom reports that 75% of online adults read AI summaries when searching online, including 54% of those who say they don't use any AI chatbots directly.

When it comes to workplace adoption, the US Federal Reserve (the Fed) reports around two in five large firms have adopted AI, and a late-2025 European Central Bank (ECB) survey of 5,000 euro-area firms found that two-thirds already had employees using AI. However, just 7% described their use as 'significant', suggesting AI remains far from embedded in many organisations.

Eurostat data, meanwhile, puts *information and communication* companies – which includes media – at significantly higher adoption rates than other sectors.

Economic impact

AI is impacting GDP – but primarily through AI spending, not through increased productivity.

Stanford reported an increase in corporate AI investment of 130% between 2024 and 2025, while global AI venture capital investment reached $430bn in H1 2026, according to EY. Indeed, the Fed reports that AI-related investment has contributed meaningfully to recent US GDP growth.

But there is little evidence of task-level productivity improvements accumulating into large economy-wide productivity effects. As The Economist put it in May, "America is experiencing a productivity miracle. AI hasn't—yet—got much to do with it."

> AI spending is impacting GDP. AI productivity gains are not.

Within media, there is similarly little hard evidence of AI's impact on the top line: despite widespread deployment, public evidence directly attributing material revenue growth to AI remains scarce. And even looking at efficiency rather than revenue, McKinsey found modest 5 to 10 percent productivity gains in production processes – desirable, but not transformative.

The cost of AI

AI is getting more expensive, even as it gets cheaper.

The cost of inference (using AI models) is falling rapidly. Goldman Sachs estimates per-token cost reducing by 60% or more a year. But it also forecasts a 24-fold increase in token consumption by 2030.

Token costs are reducing, but consumption is rising

Increasingly, the issue is cost per task, not cost per token. AI agents reason, call tools, and validate results over multiple steps. HPE provides an example of a 400 token chatbot exchange becoming a 21,500 token agentic RAG task.

The effect can be seen in new models with higher reasoning. The Verge reports one Gemini update maintained the same per-token price but cost around 40% more per task in independent testing.

It's such an issue that the Linux Foundation launched the Tokenomics Foundation to standardise measurement of AI costs and value. As AI usage grows, affordability will depend on using the right model at the right moment.

The impact on jobs

Like any technological revolution, AI will destroy some jobs and create others. But unlike the Industrial Revolution, its impact will not be concentrated on manual and lower-paid work. Anthropic researchers said "workers in the most exposed professions are more likely to be older, female, more educated, and higher-paid".

In 2024, the IMF estimated that in advanced economies, around 60% of jobs are exposed to AI. But exposure doesn't necessarily mean job losses: roughly half of those jobs could benefit from AI integration, while others could see reduced labour demand.

Jobs exposed to AI are not necessarily jobs at risk from AI

The clearest emerging employment impact is on entry-level roles. Stanford reports that there is correlation between fields where AI productivity gains are being seen and where entry-level employment is starting to decline. For example, employment among software developers aged 22–25 has fallen by nearly 20% from its peak, even as employment for their older peers continued to rise.

ECB analysis shows similar trends, while Anthropic reports that there is "no systematic increase in unemployment for highly exposed workers... though we find suggestive evidence that hiring of younger workers has slowed in exposed occupations".

The AI trust gap

AI use is growing extremely rapidly. But there remains a great deal of nervousness about media companies using AI.

Hub Entertainment Research finds that 40% of people are 'completely comfortable' with ordinary people using AI, but just 21% for companies using it commercially. Reuters Institute data shows just 12% comfortable with AI-generated news output, compared to 43% with a human making use of AI, and 62% for entirely human-made content.

That ambivalence extends to media professionals themselves: 56% of UK journalists use AI weekly, reports Reuters institute, even as 62% see it as a 'large' or 'very large' threat to journalism.

Journalists use AI, but also see it as a threat to their profession

Backlash, without rejection

Concern about AI is rising, particularly among younger people. But behaviour is not moving in the same direction: Gen Z's use of Gen AI remains broadly stable despite growing scepticism.

Pew reports that 55% of US 18-29 year olds are more concerned than excited about AI; only 11% feel the opposite. Yet chatbot use among the same age group rose from 55% in 2024 to 66% in 2026.

Gallup finds the same contradiction: 51% of US Gen Z uses Gen AI weekly, essentially unchanged from 2025 – even as AI excitement fell 14 percentage points and anger rose nine points.

AI concern is growing – but so is AI usage

The pattern extends to younger users: Ofcom reports that AI use among UK 8–17 year olds has risen from 46% to 56% in two years. Anti-AI sentiment is growing, but so far usage is growing with it.

AI in media creation

Google Cloud research found 64% of media and entertainment companies already had Gen AI use cases – but adoption was lowest in content production processes (35%), behind customer service, commerce, individual productivity, marketing, and back-office applications.

Despite common discourse about AI "slop", the evidence is clear: AI is capable of producing quality content. A Deezer/Ipsos study found that 97% of people failed to correctly distinguish fully AI-generated and human-made music in a three-track blind test. Meanwhile, Science Advances found that access to Gen AI helped writers to produce stories that were more creative, better written, and more enjoyable.

However, in raising the overall quality bar, differentiation is reduced. In the *Science Advances* test, AI-enabled stories were more similar to each other. Similarly, judges at the World AI Film Festival found that works lacked emotional quality and narrative strength, despite rapid advances in technical quality.

AI can produce excellent content – so distinctiveness will become relatively scarcer, and hence more valuable

AI isn't just creating bad content; it's creating much more good content. But it risks making it more average. As a result, distinctive content will become relatively scarcer, and hence more valuable.

AI in media distribution

The bigger impact of AI on the media industry in the medium term is likely to be downstream – in distribution, monetisation, personalisation, and fan engagement.

The Reuters Institute found that Google traffic from organic search to over 2,500 sites was down by a third globally between November 2024 and November 2025, as AI summaries and chatbots increasingly answer users' questions directly. This is a major threat to news publishers.

But Hub Entertainment Research found significant opportunities too. Of 20 AI use cases tested with consumers, the strongest positive reactions were to applications that improve viewer experience – such as better recommendations and relevant advertising.

Recommendations and personalisation are key use cases

Personalisation is a strong AI use case: Deloitte finds that 32% of sports fans want personalised highlights, while 22% of fans say they would use streaming video services more if Gen AI provided more personalised recommendations. And Forrester research commissioned by Akamai found 64% of media & entertainment decision makers said they were implementing or scaling personalised recommendations.

Driving value to media companies

The rights to – and value of – content used to train models has become a key battleground. In 2024, OpenAI signed a five-year licensing agreement with News Corp reportedly worth $250m. It has also reached agreements with publishers including AP, Axel Springer, the Financial Times, Vox Media, Condé Nast and Hearst, while other AI providers have comparable arrangements.

However, the legal context is becoming increasingly complex and fragmented by region. The US administration argues that AI model training generally makes fair use of copyrighted material, while in the EU rightsholders may expressly reserve their rights against use for commercial data mining.

Legal context is increasingly fragmented by region

New partnerships are exploring how value could be created by combining AI technology with media companies' IP. In June, Lionsgate took an equity stake in Runway, using its catalogue and Runway's tools to help generate new AI content and IP. This follows the planned Disney-OpenAI partnership to offer Sora users access to Disney IP, which was abandoned when OpenAI discontinued the Sora service.

Regulation and rules

The next few years will be significantly shaped by governmental and national views on AI.

The EU AI Act is likely the most consequential regime. It requires AI providers to maintain copyright compliance policies, publish summaries of content used for training, and respect rights-holders'

reservations against data mining. Significant proportions of the Act came into force in August, including rules that generative systems must support identification of AI-generated or manipulated outputs.

The USA has a less coordinated approach, with a mix of state legislation and litigation outcomes. California is emerging as an important source of US rules. AB 2013 requires AI developers to disclose information about training datasets, while the state's AI Transparency Act introduces provenance and disclosure requirements for synthetic images, audio and video.

Significant portions of the AI Act came into force this August

But the biggest day-to-day impacts will come from industries developing their own rules. Australia's ARIA charts, for example, now exclude wholly AI-generated tracks, while allowing AI-assisted music where the track is "substantially human-made".

Although streaming dramatically accelerated the globalisation of the content market, wildly differing approaches to AI reinforce national boundaries. International media companies must tailor their approach by territory.

What our data is telling us

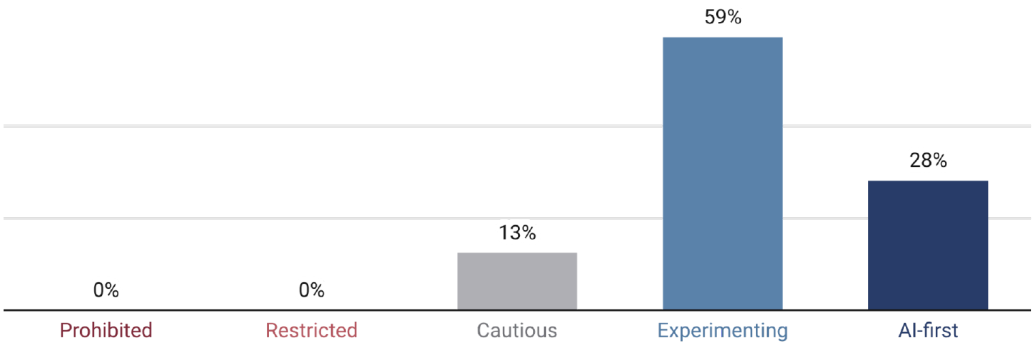
DPP data shows an industry moving rapidly from AI experimentation towards implementation – but with clear demonstration of strategic value still proving rare.

At the **DPP Leaders' Briefing**, 71% of companies discussed AI in 2023, as generative AI suddenly became ubiquitous. That fell to 52% in 2024 before rising to 64% in 2025, when 18 companies made some aspect of AI one of their three headline priorities. By then, discussion had shifted from AI as a general technology trend towards productivity, scale, return on investment, and agentic workflows.

The evolution of CTOs' AI strategy

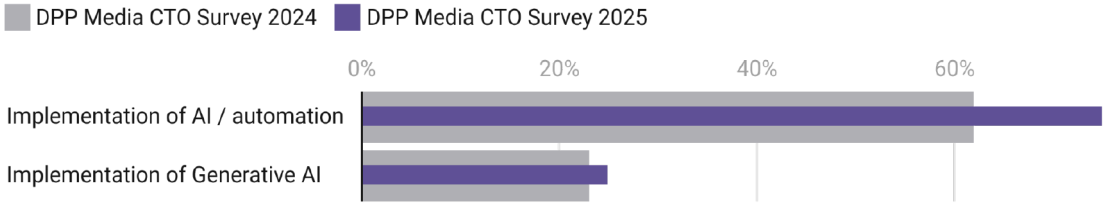
AI has moved rapidly from experimentation towards implementation. In the 2025 **Media CTO Survey**, over a quarter of CTOs described their approach as 'AI-first', with just 13% remaining cautious. The focus was on AI automation, which was a priority for 75%, up from 62% in 2024. The use of AI for content creation is a much lower priority.

Which statement best describes your organisation's overall approach to adopting the latest AI capabilities (e.g. Agentic AI and GenAI)?



Over a quarter of media CTOs have an AI-first approach

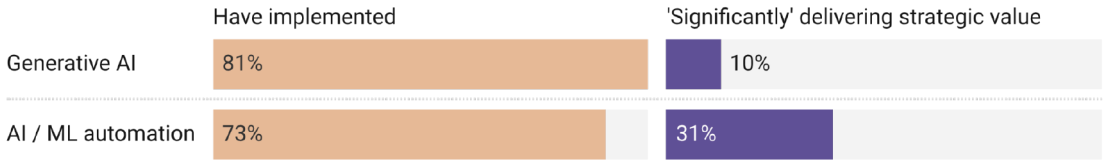
Which technology programmes and projects will be your main focus in the next year? *[Abridged results]*



That momentum has continued. At this year's **Media Supply Festival**, 65% of content providers said AI-driven automation would receive the biggest technology investment over the next 12 months.

But implementation does not necessarily equate to value. In 2024, just 10% of CTOs said Gen AI was delivering strategic value, despite 81% having implemented it.

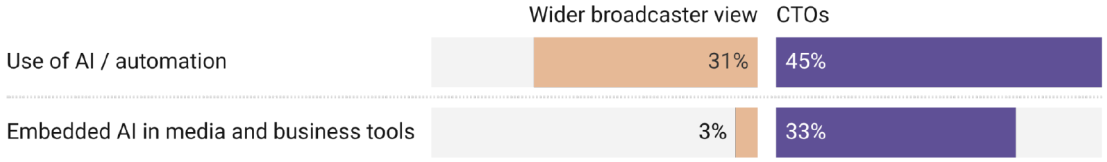
Which technologies has your technology function adopted (in any capacity), and to what extent are they delivering value to your operations? *[Abridged results]*



Implementation is widespread – strategic value is not

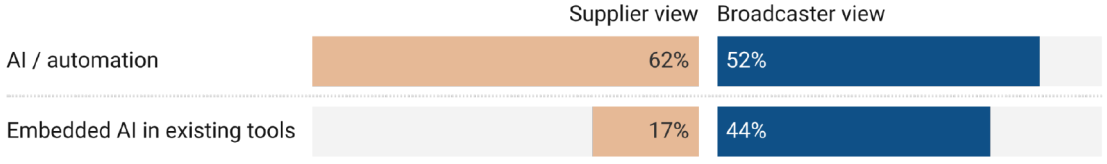
CTOs have consistently placed greater emphasis on AI than the wider industry. When the same question was asked of CTOs in the Media CTO Survey 2025 and a wider range of broadcaster executives at the **European Broadcaster Summit** 2025, it was CTOs who identified AI as a greater driver of transformation.

What do you think have been the main technology drivers of change in your organisation in the last five years? *[Abridged results]*



A year later, at the European Broadcaster Summit 2026, we asked both broadcaster and supplier attendees what had been the main drivers of change over just the previous 12 months, and AI featured much more strongly.

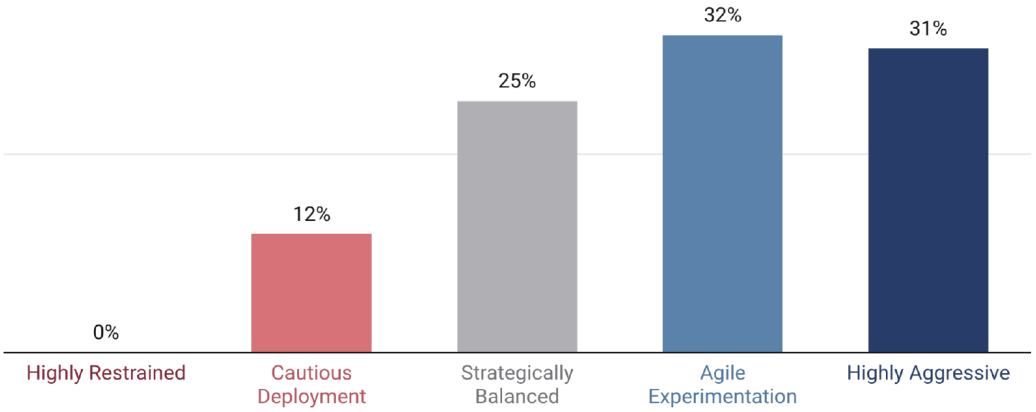
In the last year, what do you think have been the main technology drivers of change in your organisation, and in the European media industry? *[Abridged results]*



Changing focus for vendors

For media tech company CEOs, implementing AI has become a core priority. In 2025, 40% of media technology CEOs said AI was core to their product roadmap. By 2026, 78% said their approach to AI had become more aggressive in just 12 months, with almost a third describing their strategy as “highly aggressive”.

Overall, do you feel your organisation is closer to a state of "AI Paralysis" (waiting for regulation/standards, robust use cases, etc) or pushing towards "AI Aggression" (develop and deploy first, refine later)?

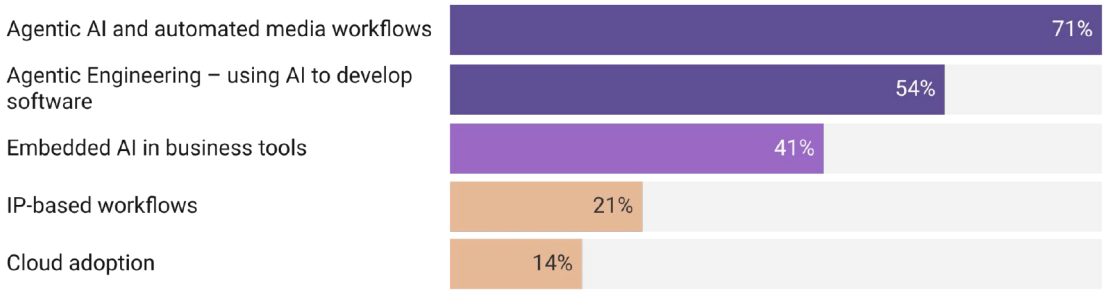


Embedding AI capabilities in existing products remains important, rising as a priority from 47% of CEOs in 2025 to 55% in 2026. But the more dramatic shift is in how those products are built.

The most dramatic change for vendors is how products are built

Agentic Engineering was not mentioned in the 2025 survey or its associated workshops and interviews. Yet in 2026, CEOs identified it as both one of the biggest drivers of change in the last 12 months (55%), and the top priority for the next 1-2 years (57%).

What do you think have been the main industry technology drivers of change in the last 12 months? *[Abridged results]*



What are your top strategic priorities for the next 1-2 years? *[Abridged results]*



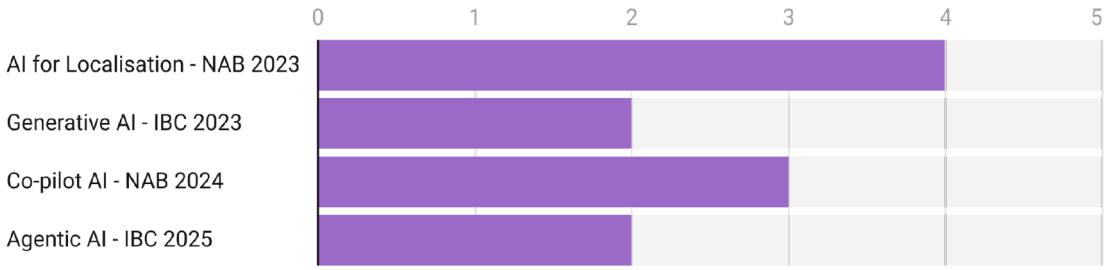
Where AI is being applied

The clearest value is coming from targeted AI applications.

The DPP's **Demand vs Supply** reports identify customer demands for technologies and services, and assess how the market responds. In the *IBC 2026* edition, 69% of surveyed customers chose 'Agentic/AI automation' as one of their top three needs, and 59% were looking to drive operational efficiencies – often through AI.

In each report, the topics explored are assigned a score out of 5, indicating the maturity of the market supply. The highest scores have so far appeared where AI is applied to specific, practical problems.

DPP Demand vs Supply – topic maturity scores

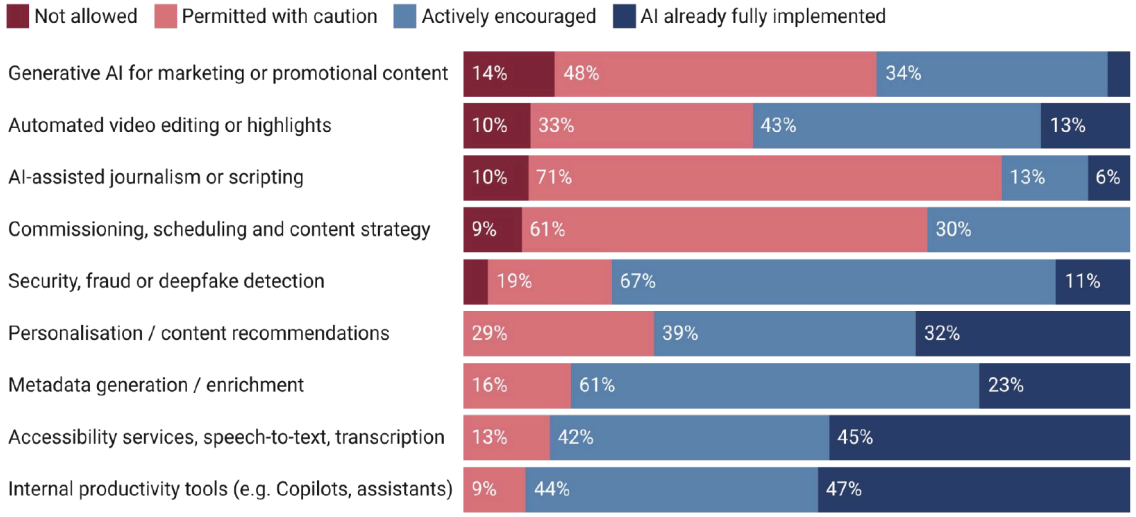


Agentic automation will be reassessed at IBC 2026, and our initial research shows significant progress, with the score likely to increase.

Targeted AI applications are delivering the clearest value

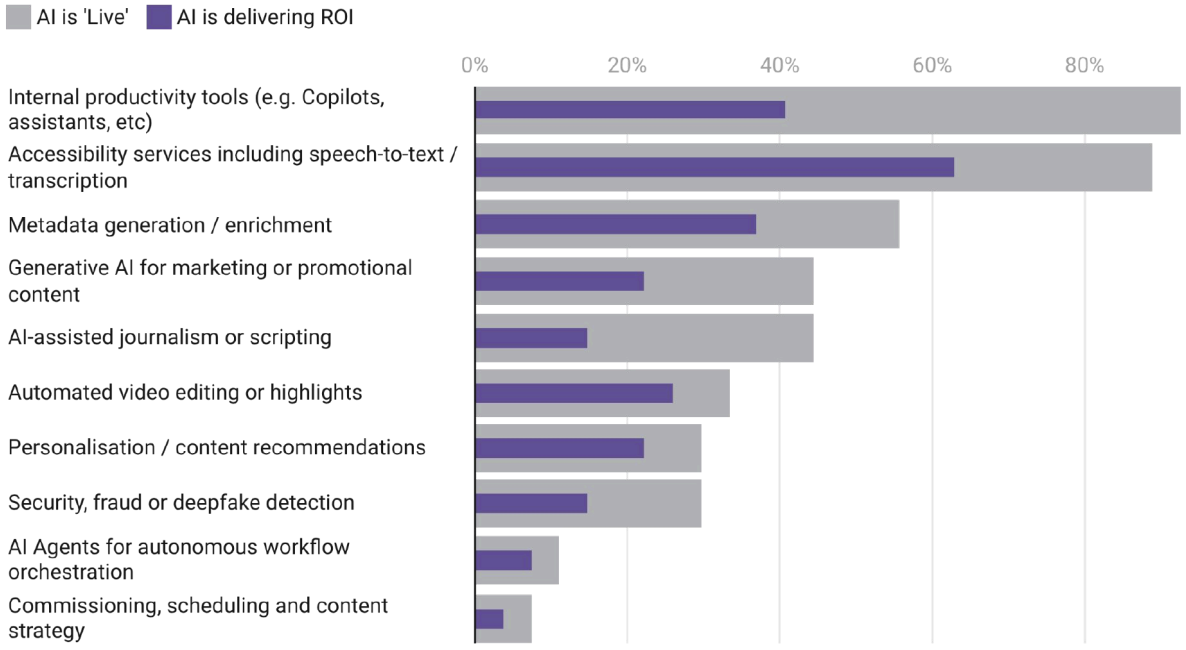
In the Media CTO Survey 2025, media tech leaders shared their approach to different AI use cases. Again, those that solve specific, defined problems – such as transcription and content recommendation – were broadly used, alongside AI chatbots and assistants.

To what extent are you enabling or restricting the use of the latest AI capabilities (e.g. Agentic AI and GenAI) across the following areas of your technology, IT, and broadcast functions?



But at the European Broadcaster Summit 2026, those targeted use cases were seen to deliver more value than the general purpose productivity tools.

Where is AI currently "Live" in your daily workflows, and where is your organisation currently seeing the most genuine and measurable ROI?



This represents a strong development from our 2024 **AI in Media** publication, in which we reported specialist applications of generative AI remained scarce and general-purpose tools were developing fastest. Two years later, it is often the targeted, domain-specific applications that are delivering the clearest value.

Building future technology

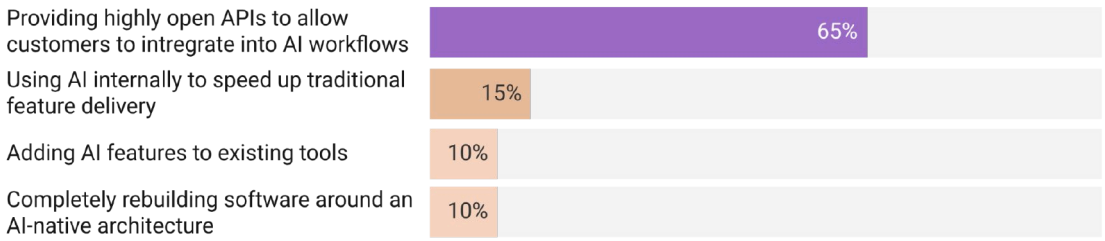
Agentic Engineering – building software with AI through a more robust process than simply 'vibe coding' – emerged as a critical theme at the Media Supply Festival 2026.

It could significantly shift the traditional "buy vs build" equation. At the Festival, 84% anticipated a shift towards build, while in our annual survey 79% of Media Tech CEOs expected the same. Preliminary Media CTO Survey 2026 results show 79% saying AI coding is already changing their own approach towards build – compared with just 19% of European Broadcaster Summit attendees six months earlier.

Agentic engineering is changing the buy vs build equation

But this will not simply mean replacing buy with build. While some media companies will aggressively move towards building their own tools using AI agents, a far bigger number will use AI to orchestrate their workflows across specialist tools that they buy from vendors. At the Media Supply Festival, 65% identified the ability to integrate tools into AI workflows as the most important requirement for vendors' AI roadmaps.

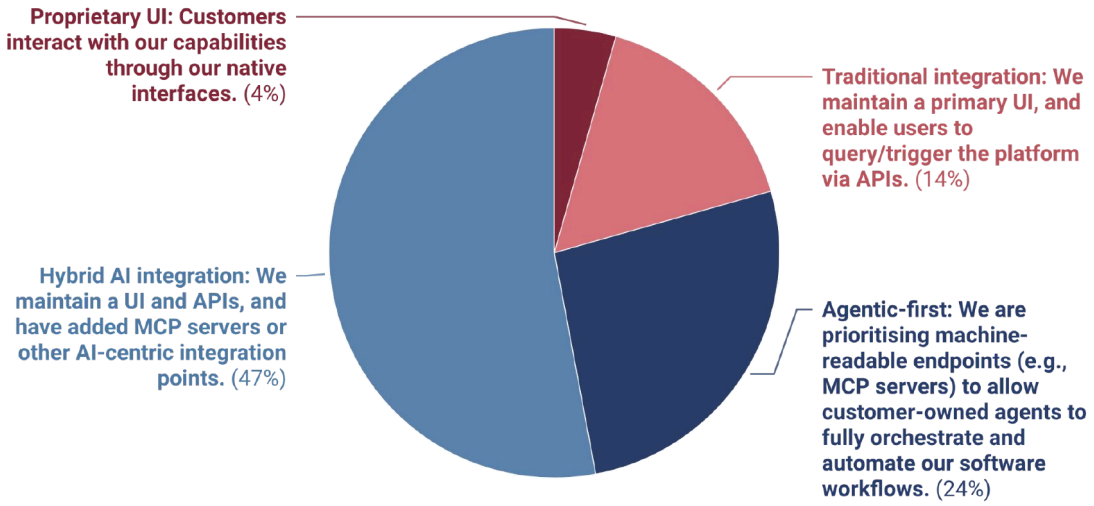
What is the most important requirement for media technology vendors' AI roadmaps?



This direction is already influencing product architecture. Over 70% of vendor CEOs in 2026 expect customers to interact with their products via AI agents, with 24% saying they are preparing for "Agentic-first" customer interactions.

AI agents will change product architecture and economics

How do you expect customers and their AI Agents to interact with your platform/technology over the next 24 months?



That architectural shift has commercial consequences. As AI agents replace some direct human interaction with software, 78% of CEOs say traditional seat-based SaaS pricing must evolve towards value- or consumption-based models.

Building future teams

The rapid impact of AI on software development is also changing the skills companies need. Preliminary results from the Media CTO Survey 2026 show media company CTOs expecting largely neutral impacts on junior roles, while 41% of media tech CEOs believe AI is already having a negative impact on entry-level jobs.

But this does not mean technology companies expect to need fewer people overall. In the Media Tech CEO Survey 2026, 72% plan to grow their technology and product teams – even though 51% said these were among the hardest roles to recruit. CEOs described established roles as changing rapidly, with adaptability and willingness to embrace AI becoming increasingly important.

Upskilling is the preferred response to changing skills needs

For many companies, the answer is therefore to develop existing teams. At the Media Supply Festival, 73% said their primary strategy for closing the AI skills gap was aggressive upskilling and training of existing staff, rather than recruiting specialist AI talent.

What our network is telling us

Media company and vendor leaders have been giving their perspectives on AI throughout its development. And their words expose more of their motivations, feelings, and experiences than data alone ever could.

From possibility to purpose

When it first emerged, AI was an exciting possibility. But media industry leaders turned their focus to practical benefits remarkably quickly. At the Leaders' Briefing in 2023, Paul Shanley captured the prevailing mood.

> ***AI is not a strategy; it's a means to an end.***
>
> Paul Shanley, AP

He explained that becoming *the fastest news agency in the world* could be a strategy. But implementing AI could not. He cautioned attendees to focus on benefits and competencies, not technologies.

Two years later, Paul Kane provided almost the perfect follow-up.

> ***The real aim was not just to experiment, but to scale.***
> ***We don't want shiny demos. We want real world ROI.***
>
> Paul Kane, ITV

Kane spoke about ITV's desire to find solutions that they can scale 'to industrial levels'.

Vendor leaders, meanwhile, are increasingly expressing a similar focus on clear ROI, with one response in the Media Tech CEO Survey 2026 reflecting that there needs to be "more adult supervision on the business case", to understand whether AI is producing profit or revenue growth, rather than theoretical efficiency savings.

AI must produce profit, not just theoretical efficiency

Changing workflows, not just technology

As is so often the case with change, the limiting factor is as much the organisation as the technology.

> ***There are three factors at play here. First, the maturity of the AI solutions. Second, the maturity of our tech stack to integrate AI solutions. Third, the maturity of the organisation to harness the first two factors. And the third part is by far the most challenging.***
>
> A contributor to the DPP Media CTO Survey 2025

At DPG Media, one engineering team was given five weeks to rethink its entire operating model around AI. The experiment delivered a threefold increase in feature throughput – but many of the key lessons were organisational.

> ***Don't bolt AI on your current processes. Reinvent the entire operating model with AI at the core.***
>
> Ygor Geurts, DPG Media

Reshaping vendor relationships

As we saw in *What our data is telling us*, media companies are increasingly using AI to connect together the specialist components they buy – becoming what one CTO called an "integration house".

Media companies are becoming 'integration houses'

> ***'Build vs buy' has been replaced by 'build with'.***
>
> Paul Kane, ITV

At the Media Supply Festival 2026, Versant was particularly clear about how AI is changing the interaction model it wants from its vendors.

> ***I don't care about your UI. I'm not going to use it. I want the API. I want the logic. I want you to plug into the agent, because that's how they're going to interact with that functionality, not through the UI.***
>
> Kyle Strickland, Versant

The same shift is observed by the vendors too.

> ***The most successful deployments are those where we are 100% invisible.***
>
> A contributor to the DPP Media Tech CEO Survey 2026

But greater customer capability to build software does not necessarily make specialist suppliers redundant. SDVI COO Simon Eldridge argues that "ultimately it comes down to domain expertise". AI does not fundamentally change the 'build vs buy' calculus, he says; it simply removes some of the barriers for organisations already inclined to build.

AI does not fundamentally change the 'buy vs build' calculus

AI creates new bottlenecks

Agentic engineering has created new opportunities, and new challenges. For vendors especially, it's lowered the bar for what features are worth developing.

> ***We can build much more, much faster. Things that would have taken us a year, for which we weren't certain we could make the investment, now we don't even hesitate — we just go.***
>
> A contributor to the DPP Media Tech CEO Survey 2026

For some vendors, this creates a new problem as the bottleneck is pushed downstream into marketing and sales, where go-to-market tasks may not have been accelerated so much. Another CEO shared that they've had internal discussions about the need to slow down.

Just as the value of human judgement is being highlighted in the creative domain, the DPP expects the same to be true in technology – where product judgement, prioritisation, and customer understanding will be more important than ever.

Human judgement remains relevant

So too in media operations, leaders highlight the value of human decision making.

> ***AI creates space by clearing friction... so that people can focus on judgement, on impact and insight.***
>
> Andy Bolding, Paramount

Technology vendors echo similar sentiments. But the challenge is now finding the right people, developing the right skills, and creating the right culture.

> ***The roles change. They don't go away. But junior engineers are not getting hired... Those people are the architects and senior engineers of the future. So how are you going to build those people?***
>
> Simon Eldridge, SDVI

In service of audiences and revenue

Following the Leaders' Briefing 2025 we said: *The job of technology and processes is to connect the creative with the consumer with as little friction as possible. Everything else - including AI - must serve that purpose.*

AI must help connect the creative with the consumer

Speakers at that event in particular emphasised the importance of having a distinctive consumer offering – and many spoke about the role of AI in achieving that. It has the potential to significantly improve content discovery and personalisation. But humans will create personal connection.

> ***Creators aren't important because they're generating more content. They're important because they create a fundamentally different relationship with audiences. In an era of total media abundance, creators build bi-directional relationships.***
>
> David Salmon, Tubi

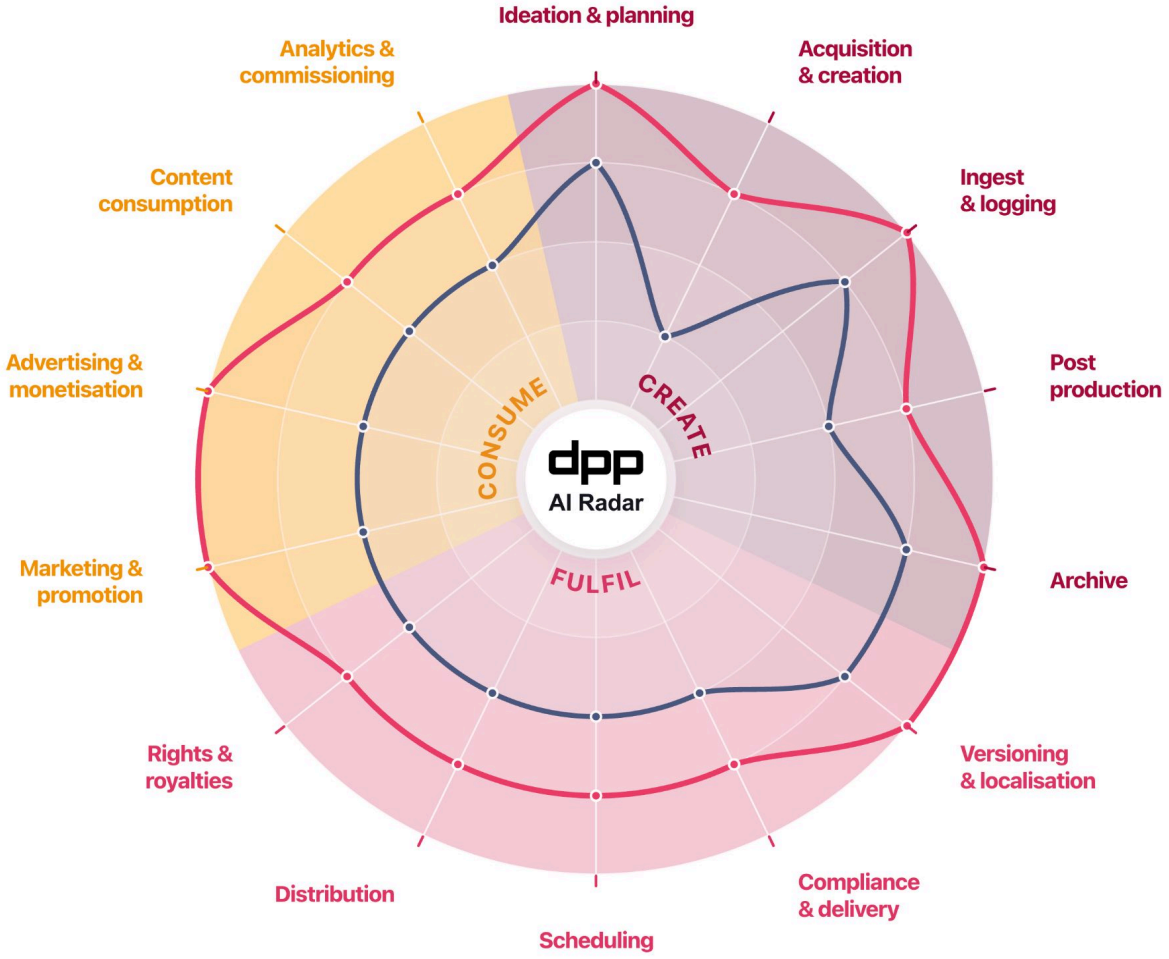
And at *Production Now* in August 2026, Seth Hallen took this further, explaining clearly how the biggest impacts of AI will be in the distribution and monetisation of human creativity.

> ***The most economically powerful AI in media may not be the system that generates the frame. It might be the system that decides who gets to see the frame and how that attention gets monetised. We already know how to make the frame. The next competitive advantage is knowing who should see it, why it reaches them, and what happens next. That's a content problem. That's a marketing problem. It's an engineering problem. But most of all, it's a revenue problem.***
> ***Premium IP is still the spark.***
>
> Seth Hallen, Hallstone Partners

The DPP Media AI Radar 2026

The DPP Media AI Radar shows our assessment of how AI is impacting the content supply chain.

Across 14 stages, we assess the potential for AI's impact and the maturity of its use today. Our assessment has been updated annually since 2024.



2026 has seen strong progress, with maturity scores increasing for **archive**, **versioning & localisation**, **scheduling**, **rights & royalties**, and **advertising & monetisation**. Our assessment of potential has also increased in the areas of **archive** and **versioning & localisation**.

Yet potential fell in **compliance & delivery** and **analytics & commissioning**, reflecting increased risk awareness, and greater understanding of AI's strengths and limitations.

Explore how scores have changed over time – and why – using our interactive radar at:

thedpp.com/ai-radar

What it means

In The DPP Tech Trends 2026, we said that *urgency to monetise content and the IP around it will take precedence over efficiency savings through AI* – and that's proving to be accurate. The evidence in this report enables us to draw some clear conclusions for leaders in media and technology.

The ROI test has begun

2026 is the year we stopped giving AI a free pass.

AI adoption and investment are both enormous. But neither macroeconomic evidence nor the DPP's industry data yet shows value commensurate with the excitement.

Value delivered doesn't yet match AI excitement

At the start of the year, we still heard of companies incentivising staff to use AI for its own sake – with no measurement of productivity or revenue gains. Now, media companies are rightly calling for ROI.

And the strongest value is emerging from targeted, domain-specific applications rather than generic AI.

Recognise the gains – and the costs

Although many use cases remain nascent, the DPP Media AI Radar shows rapid maturation in key areas. Functions such as transcription, translation, and summarisation have become commodities, and capabilities like data analysis, planning, archive management, and ad targeting are developing fast.

Simultaneously, AI has become remarkably capable at creating software; it's arguably now impacting technology vendors faster than media companies. It's leading to unprecedented feature velocity. But this capability comes with a price: one CEO put AI compute alongside staff and trade show booths in their top 3 cost drivers.

AI compute is now a major cost centre

AI's technical trajectory may currently be clearer than its economic one.

Reinvention and revenue

Media companies have focused heavily on using AI to automate existing processes. But micro efficiencies are failing to produce macro effects.

The next priorities for media leaders must be in two areas:

- **Reinvent processes** – Don't automate yesterday's operating model. Redesign processes around what AI now makes possible.

- **Revenue over efficiency** – Shift the focus to the top line: use AI to get the right content to the right users, with a better experience, to drive more revenue.

The biggest near- to medium-term impacts from AI are very likely to be downstream in the media value chain – in content personalisation, discovery, recommendation, and monetisation.

AI will have bigger impacts later in the media value chain

From vibes to value

For vendors and engineering leaders, meanwhile, adopting AI has become a competitive necessity.

But where a year ago the prevailing wisdom was that they must add AI *features* to their products, software companies are now much more concerned with using AI to *build* their products.

In recent months, *vibe coding* has been all the rage. But software built on vibes alone might not stand up to broadcast-critical use cases. And so the conversation is already moving from vibe coding to *agentic engineering*.

The ability to create software faster is reshaping customer-supplier relationships, reinforcing the criticality of vendors' customer understanding, domain expertise, prioritisation, and taste.

Agents are the new users

A majority of media company customers are now asking vendors for tools that integrate into their AI workflows. User Interfaces (UIs) are not going away – but Agent Interfaces might become the 'AI' that really matters for most software companies.

Agentic Interfaces might be the 'AI' that really matters

But according to Mediafier's Agentic Experience Index – which assesses software tools' readiness for agentic interaction – media technology products are still highly human dependent. They achieved an average score of 30/100, compared to 95 for major infrastructure providers like clouds.

As software gains a new class of user – the AI agent – media technology vendors must deliver more AI-accessible products, and rethink revenue models as agents erode the logic of seat-based pricing.

Build capability, not dependency

AI is changing roles faster than it is eliminating them.

Leaders should prioritise aggressive upskilling of existing teams, while protecting the pathways through which junior talent develops into tomorrow's experts. Removing entry-level work without replacing the learning it provided will create a capability problem for the future.

Enhancing human creativity

In media, none of this matters unless AI ultimately helps connect creative work with audiences and generate value.

Just as AI can now generate software, it can also generate content. And there is a great deal of public discourse about AI-generated content. There will, of course, be a lot of it. But that conversation risks being a distraction for leaders in media and entertainment.

As content becomes ever more abundant, trust, expertise, brand, and audience relationships will matter more than ever. The scarce resource is shifting from production capability to judgement and authenticity.

> **The scarce resource is now judgement, not production capability**

The AI revolution in professional media is therefore more likely to amplify human creativity than replace it. Creative talent will use AI to enhance their craft.

AI makes it possible to create more – but 'more' isn't the objective. When everyone can make more, the competitive advantage comes from knowing what to make, what not to, and how to connect with the audience.

Key resources

DPP reports and videos













Key external sources

Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2026

Stanford AI Index 2026

Sensor Tower State of AI 2026

Deloitte 2026 Digital Media Trends

Akamai The State of Enterprise AI in Media and Entertainment

Mediafier Agentic Experience Index

Hub Entertainment Research AI & Audiences

Gallup: Voices of Gen Z

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About Akamai

Akamai is the cybersecurity and cloud computing company that powers and protects business online. Its market-leading security solutions, superior threat intelligence, and global operations team provide defense in depth to safeguard enterprise data and applications everywhere. Akamai's full-stack cloud computing solutions deliver performance and affordability on the world's most distributed platform. Global enterprises trust Akamai to provide the industry-leading reliability, scale, and expertise they need to grow their business with confidence. Learn more at akamai.com and akamai.com/blog, or follow Akamai Technologies on X and LinkedIn.

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